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AUTHOR Chambliss, Catherine; Magakis, George
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ABSTRACT

Incorporating films in abnormal psychology courses often helps to enliven the class and engage students in the diagnostic process. This summary of films that have been effectively incorporated by clinical instructors may be of value to those wishing to enhance their classroom presentations of these content areas. Although use of mass-marketed films in teaching psychopathology requires more involvement on the part of instructors (who need to point out inaccuracies, structure discussion, and actively integrate material with course syllabi and readings), the ambiguities presented by these films can offer certain pedagogic advantages. As in real-life diagnostic situations, the characters portrayed in many films do not conform perfectly to DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) criteria. Classes enjoy debating which diagnosis has the "best fit," much the same way as do professionals attending problem case conferences. This type of experience with critical thinking and clinical judgment prepares students for the unclear diagnostic situations they will eventually confront professionally. (TS)

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Videotapes for Use in Teaching Psychopathology

Catherine Chambliss, Ph.D.

George Magakis, Ph.D.

Ursinus College

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After teaching psychopathology for nearly two decades, we've found that incorporating films in abnormal psychology courses often helps to enliven the class and engage students in the diagnostic process. This summary of films that have been effectively incorporated by clinical instructors may be of value to those wishing to enhance their classroom presentations of these content areas.

While some professional libraries have invested in films developed with clinicians especially for this type of educational purpose, most of these expensive materials are outside of the budget of most financially strapped academic departments. Furthermore, awareness of our evolving diagnostic nomenclature leaves many department chairs understandably reluctant to invest heavily in series that may become obsolete with the next revision of the DSM. Lastly, the production budgets of the films specifically targeting the professional and education audience are

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eclipsed by those of regular commercial film studios. Consequently, the quality of such commercial films generally exceeds that of the more educationally-focused films. Mass-market films are readily available for inexpensive videotape rental. Students have rented these videos and shown excerpts as part of their term project presentations. Others have been so inspired by the power of this medium that they have produced and displayed their own videotaped illustrations of mock family and couples therapy.

Although use of mass-marketed films in teaching psychopathology requires more involvement on the part of instructors, who need to point out inaccuracies, structure discussion, and actively integrate material with course syllabi and readings, the ambiguities presented can offer certain pedagogic advantages. As in real-life diagnostic situations, the characters portrayed in many films do not conform perfectly to DSM criteria. Classes enjoy debating which diagnosis has the "best fit", much the same way as do professionals attending problem case conferences. This type of experience with critical thinking and clinical judgment prepares students for the unclear diagnostic situations they will eventually confront professionally.

In order to obtain suggestions for films of value in teaching abnormal psychology courses, during the past several years we have solicited opinions from colleagues attending professional teaching conferences and continuing education programs related to diagnostic issues. In addition, responses to an internet query have been included.

GREAT VIDEOS TO USE IN TEACHING ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

VIDEO	DISORDER/TOPIC
THREE FACES OF EVE	Multiple personality disorder. treatment. disposition or history?
PERSONA	Enmeshment. sharing one identity between two people.
THE PAWNBROKER	Post-traumatic stress disorder. ineffective coping strategies.
THE MEN	Adjustment disorder. coping with physical injury.
CLEAN AND SOBER	Drug and alcohol disorders. treatment.
BIRDY	Schizotypal personality disorder. predisposition or environment.
A FACE IN THE CROWD	Psychopathy. the successful psychopaths among us.
HOUSE OF GAMES	Psychopathy. how even the most sophisticated can be taken in.
BADLANDS	Psychopathy. the superficial charm of the psychopath. mass murder.
TAXI DRIVER	Psychotic breakdown. and mass murder.
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST	Schizophrenia. institutional treatment.
RASHOMON	Projection. how people see the same events differently.
ORDINARY PEOPLE	Family in crisis. family dynamics in identified patient.
LION IN WINTER	Family dynamics. Dysfunctional communication in a family.
RAINMAN	Autism. difficulty of dealing with people with severe disorders.
CHARLY	Mental retardation. limits of treatment.
A CLOCKWORK ORANGE	Issues in dealing with problems in society. Limits of policy.
MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE	The abuse of psychological principles. Role of scientist.
INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS	The negative social forces that shape us: obedience & conformity.
THE MARK	Psychotherapy. The nature of change in a patient.

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Fatal Attraction has been useful, because many believe the Glen Close character exhibits all of the diagnostic criteria of Borderline Personality Disorder. The movie "My Left Foot" has some sequences early on that are exquisite descriptions of the alcoholic family dynamic. These films and others can stimulate thinking around the issues of psychopathology and violence, and help students learn that not all people who are mentally ill are dangerous.

Several colleagues reported success with the following films: The Piano; The Prince of Tides ; What's Eating Gilbert Grape? ; Three Faces of Eve ; Consenting Adults ; Awakenings ; Dead Poet's Society ; Ordinary People ; One Flew Over the C ckoo's Nest ; Rain Man ; Sybil ; Nell ; Forrest Gump; Blue Velvet; Awakenings; Clockwork Orange; Betty Blue; David and Lisa; Lilith; Sybil; Mosquito Coast; Altered States; Silence of the Lambs; Angela; Nixon; Gaslight; Blue Sky; Suddenly Last Summer; and Marnie.

Of course, several of the Hitchcock movies are worth reviewing; they portray various kinds of psychopathology. Hitchcock's "Spellbound" illustrates psychogenic amnesia. A workshop on dissociative disorders a few years ago incorporated clips of it for that purpose.

The Clint Eastwood film, Tightrope, is about a detective's obsession with a crime and how he crosses the line in attempting to solve the crime. This has some relevance to psychologists and how they have to keep their distance. Falling Down presents good material for discussion about obsessive personality disorder versus

borderline pathology.

King of Hearts is a good off beat film about a deserted town in France during WWII prior to Nazi Invasion. In the town, the local asylum becomes unlocked and the inmates take over the town... It's an interesting commentary on who is really ill; good for students to mull over.

For historical perspective, some recommend "The Bad Seed", which is an old movie dealing with a child who is a "psychopathic ; constitutional inferior" and is an example of one point of view (probably during the 20's, 30's and 40's) on the dominance of heredity in some forms of mental illness. The Frederick Wiseman documentary of life inside a Massachusetts mental hospital in the 60s, "Titticut Follies", is spectacular.

One favorite, which places schizophrenia in a systemic context, is John Casavetes' "Woman under the influence", starring his wife Gena Rowlands and Peter Falk. This is very powerful film that considers problematic behavior from an interactional perspective.

Ray Miland in "Lost Weekend" provides a powerful DT scene. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Is a marvelous study in interpersonal dynamics.

A fictional favorite of many is "Choose Me", which has many characters involved in each others' lives without their knowing it, and includes Genevieve Bujold as a radio psychologist who is also involved in triangles and other geometric shapes with other characters in the movie.

Also recommended is "Heavenly Creatures," a film based on the true story of two adolescent girls who developed an enmeshed, fantasy-riddled relationship in New Zealand in the 1950s. When their parents revealed plans to separate them, the girls killed one of their mothers. One of the girls grew up to become the mystery writer Anne Perry (I kid you not). Both girls had been sickly as children; one or perhaps both had been separated from their parents for years in childhood due to physical illness. I think the film could launch discussion of issues of attachment, dissociation, fantasy-proneness, and, of course, violence.

"Sybil" is a fine introduction to MPD/DID, although it's important to stress that not all multiples present like Sybil (with alters with different names, etc.). Richard Kluft has a good article on "Clinical Presentations of MPD" in the September 1991 issue of Psychiatric Clinics of North America, that can be used as a supplement.

Several years ago there was a TV movie on anorexia nervosa called "The Best Little Girl in the World". "Eating," a film by Henry Jaglom, is illustrative of women's obsessions with eating and weight. It contains a bulimic character or two.

"Jacob's Ladder" is a possible example of PTSD (combat-related). It has some surrealistic qualities (explained at the end of the film) that interfere with its being a cleancut example of PTSD, but these variances could be explored in class discussions.

It might be valuable to include some films in which the

therapists act unethically (theme: therapist psychopathology or countertransference?). Unfortunately, that list would probably include most films depicting therapy or therapists, with the usual problem being sexual misconduct. Examples: "The Prince of Tides," "Mr. Jones," "Basic Instinct," "Lovesick" (a Dudley Moore movie in which he plays a lovelorn psychiatrist who stalks a beautiful patient; Alec Guiness, I think, plays the ghost of Sigmund Freud), and "Final Analysis". Even in the oldie "Spellbound", Ingrid Bergman (the psychiatrist) falls in love with Gregory Peck (the patient).

A great source of information regarding psychological issues in movies is Frank Pittman, who frequently writes reviews in the Family Therapy Networker and incorporates movies very effectively in his workshops on family systems.

A Caution

Some of our respondents urge instructors to watch out for the dangers inherent in movies. One colleague showed Fatal Attraction in a class, and didn't finish it because the scene at the beginning has a very racist portrayal of Asians. It was offensive to Asians in the class, and that became the issue. The US version's ending was changed so that the borderline was blamed and killed. In the original ending, she committed suicide and made it look like the male did it. Some find that a much more realistic picture; that ending did well in Japan.

Most movies tend to portray the locus of pathology in the

individual, just like DSM IV. They emphasize white, middle-class values. Many family therapists use Ordinary People, for example. It suffers from several problems, if looked at from a cultural diversity/gender perspective. If you critique movies using deconstruction theory, and point out how they reflect the biases of their creators, these "deficiencies" can actually become pluses. Perhaps you could have students go to Birdcage, having read the reviews of the movie in the NY Times. This is a funny movie which shows real disrespect for gay life styles. Perhaps instead of laughing, the students will think. Helping your students learn how badly film handles these issues would be a real service to them and the profession.

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A Dozen Great Videos for Abnormal Psychology

Introduction. The following videos present "case studies" that are true to life, and illustrate not only psychopathology, but issues connected to psychopathology. Although each video is independent of the others, they seem to form an overall whole, and create a general true to life "feel" of psychopathology across a spectrum of disorders.

1. Three faces of Eve. This gives a good presentation of a multiple personality disorder, and her treatment. Her treatment is true to life in that one focus of treatment is to take control of the various personalities. In addition, the personalities portrayed are true to life. It is helpful to present an outline of the dynamics of MPDs with this tape. What is misleading in this video is the cause and supposed cure of her problems: reliving an earlier trauma.

2. The pawnbroker. An excellent movie about post traumatic stress disorder. It also portrays ineffective coping strategies. It is an overwhelming movie in many ways. How much horror can a person stand?

3. A face in the crowd. This is an excellent portrayal by Andy Griffith of a "successful" psychopath. As with many psychopaths, they go too far, and often overreach themselves.

4. House of games. This video presents a true to life look at the life of a con man and psychopath. It shows how even the most sophisticated person can be taken in. Psychopaths are good at seeing and taking advantage of our vulernabilities. A general issue that is also implicit is drawing the line between "normal" and "abnormal" benavior.

5. Birdy. This is a great tape for looking at adolescence and personality disorders. One sees how such a personality disorder can develop. Further, it raises the general question of what's important: environment or predisposition. A similar question can be raised about Three faces of Eve.

6. Clean and sober. This gives an accurate view of the treatment of drug and alcohol abusers. It points out the dynamics of their addiction, and also lack of motivation to change.

7. Taxi Driver. This is a great video for showing the psychotic breakdown of a person who later kills. Scorecese excerpted portions of Bremer's diary (he shot George Wallace) for the movie. It shows what we see on television everyday. The ending is a little too optimistic, however.

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